



## Reframing Care Strategies for Individuals Living with Fibromyalgia

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### DESCRIPTION

Fibromyalgia is a long-standing condition marked by widespread musculoskeletal discomfort, persistent fatigue, disturbed sleep, and cognitive complaints often described as brain fog. It affects people across age groups but is more frequently diagnosed in women. Despite extensive research, its exact cause remains uncertain, though altered pain processing in the central nervous system is widely accepted as a major factor. In settings with limited healthcare resources, managing this condition presents additional difficulties, including delayed diagnosis, restricted access to specialists, and limited availability of advanced therapies. Addressing fibromyalgia in such environments requires a thoughtful combination of clinical understanding, patient engagement, and pragmatic treatment planning.

Patients commonly report a diffuse pattern of pain that does not follow typical anatomical distributions. This can lead to misunderstanding or dismissal of symptoms, particularly in areas where awareness about chronic pain conditions is low. As a result, individuals may consult multiple providers before receiving an accurate diagnosis. Diagnostic criteria have evolved to focus on symptom severity and widespread pain rather than tender point examination alone. Early recognition is valuable, as it allows timely initiation of symptom control measures and reduces unnecessary investigations.

Pharmacological treatment plays a role but is often only one part of a broader plan. Medications such as low-dose antidepressants, certain anticonvulsants, and simple analgesics may help reduce pain intensity and improve sleep quality. However, reliance solely on medication is rarely sufficient. In low-income regions, cost and availability influence drug selection, which often leads clinicians to prefer widely accessible options with established safety profiles. Careful monitoring is needed to avoid side effects, particularly in populations with limited follow-up access.

Non-pharmacological approaches form a central component of effective management. Regular physical activity, even at low intensity, has been shown to improve symptoms over time.

Walking, stretching, and gentle strengthening exercises can reduce stiffness and enhance overall well-being. Education about pacing activities is equally important, as overexertion may worsen symptoms. Encouraging gradual progression helps individuals maintain consistency without triggering flare-ups.

Psychological support also holds value, especially given the strong association between fibromyalgia and mood disturbances such as anxiety and depression. Cognitive and Behavioral strategies can assist patients in coping with persistent discomfort and improving daily function. In regions where mental health services are scarce, group education sessions or community-based support programs can offer practical alternatives. These initiatives not only provide information but also reduce the sense of isolation often experienced by patients.

Sleep disturbance is another significant concern in fibromyalgia. Poor sleep quality can intensify pain perception and fatigue, creating a cycle that is difficult to break. Simple measures such as maintaining a consistent sleep schedule, reducing caffeine intake, and creating a restful environment can lead to meaningful improvements. When necessary, low-dose medications may be used, though non-drug strategies are generally preferred in resource-limited settings.

Diet and lifestyle factors are increasingly recognized as contributors to symptom variability. While no specific diet has been universally accepted, maintaining balanced nutrition and avoiding excessive processed foods may support overall health. Hydration, regular meal timing, and avoidance of known personal triggers can help some individuals manage their symptoms more effectively.

Healthcare systems in low-income countries often face constraints such as limited specialist availability and high patient loads. In this context, primary care providers play a central role in identifying and managing fibromyalgia. Training programs that enhance awareness among frontline clinicians can improve diagnostic accuracy and reduce unnecessary referrals. Integrating pain management principles into general practice allows broader access to care.

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## Conclusion

Fibromyalgia does not have a single definitive treatment, but many strategies can reduce symptom burden and improve daily functioning. In low-income countries, success often depends on practical solutions that maximize available resources while addressing the diverse needs of patients. By focusing on

awareness, early recognition, and integrated care, healthcare providers can offer effective support even in constrained environments. Continued research and collaboration are needed to refine these approaches and ensure that individuals living with fibromyalgia receive compassionate and effective care regardless of their geographic or economic circumstances.